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“ *Help me, or I perish !* ”

THE PLEA FOR PENITENTIARIES.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY THE

BISHOP OF MORAY AND ROSS,

BEFORE

THE CHURCH PENITENTIARY
ASSOCIATION,

AT ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY,

ON

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creature"—to tell to each and all that Christ had "tasted death for every man"—that He had made a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world—that since God in Christ had reconciled the world to Himself, He would not impute their trespasses unto them, for that God "had laid on Him the iniquities of us all." Glad tidings indeed to a guilty, lost, condemned, and accursed world to learn that its guilt was pardoned, its condemnation and its curse removed. But not glad tidings if this were all—pardon alone is no qualification for the Beatific Vision to a corrupt and fallen spirit. "No man," while thus defiled and corrupt in his very nature, "can see God and live." Even here there is no concord between Christ and Belial. A pardoned rebel, if in heart a rebel still, could find no pleasure in the presence of his King. The pardoned sinner, ere he can see God and live, must be a new creature. The image of God, which was shivered at the fall, must be renewed again, or Heaven itself would be to us only what Paradise became to man when he had sinned, a place wherein to hide ourselves from the presence of God. Hence, God has taught us that "without holiness no man shall see His face," and that the blessedness of seeing Him is restricted to "the pure in heart" alone. Now indeed "have we been made the sons of God," and while it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet this we do "know, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." There is no seeing Him till we are like Him. Therefore "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure."

Such, indeed, is the revelation of God's will concerning us—such the qualification—such the reward, and such the hope of those called by God out of the world to be saved. The world is now a pardoned world, a reconciled world, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." And so anxious was He who wrought this recovery for us, that all should know it from the least to the greatest, that He sent His ambassadors into all the world, charging them to preach this Gospel to every creature. To us has the Word of this salvation come. We have, through grace, accepted it. We have believed that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." He has called us to be saints. He has brought us into His Church. He hath sealed us with the Spirit of adoption. He has made us, by our baptism, citizens of that city, whose walls are salvation, where the bread of life falls like the manna for the nourish-

ment of the children of God therein, and through which the river of the water of life flows continually, where all may freely drink, and whose blessed fruits are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance." All and more than this has been done for us. He has called us to be saints. But *where* are the fruits? *Where, where are the Saints?*

Happy would it be, my brethren, for us of this Church and nation, if we would "not dare to make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves, measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves." This is no proof either of our piety or our wisdom. Deceived and misled by a crooked rule, we are, perhaps unconsciously, influenced by a conventional standard of morals, fixed rather in accordance with the rules and laws of a high state of civilization, than with that holy and perfect standard which God in Christ has fixed for training sons for glory, and fitting them for the Vision of the Almighty, and we lose sight of the ten thousand things we leave undone, in a placid and self-satisfied contemplation of the few things we do. We are indeed a great and wealthy nation; if you will, the greatest and wealthiest nation in the earth. We contemplate our public and our private charities, and we contemplate them with satisfaction only because we fail to compare them with the untold and increasing treasures which God is continually pouring into our lap and the awful misery around us. We feel with thankfulness that we are members of as pure a branch as any on earth of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, pure in doctrine, primitive and apostolic in discipline; and yet how many are there who content themselves with this knowledge of the possession of a privilege, the most awful from its responsibility, but who never reflect, that to whom God has given much, of them will He require the more. Of what avail is it to boast ourselves of purity of doctrine without purity of heart? Of what avail an apostolic discipline, if those who boast of its possession reject practical subjection to it?

While then the words of my text would naturally lead our thoughts to the consideration of that inward purity, which alone can qualify us for the enjoyment of the Presence and Vision of the Almighty, and to the enforcement of a far higher cultivation of this grace than, it is to be feared, is generally aimed at by us; yet, the object immediately before us to-day must rather lead us to reflect upon the unhappy state of those who have miserably *lost* that purity of heart;

and whose sad and well-nigh hopeless condition may surely awaken the liveliest sympathy of those, who are themselves enjoying a well-grounded hope of the happiness of Heaven, and who can therefore feel how desolate must be the hearts of those who have no such hope; who sigh for penitence but have none to guide them to it; who long to quit their Hell upon earth, if they could but find some retreat, some quiet home, where, in the exercise of penitence and faith, they might recover that "purity" without which, they know, they can never "see God;" and where the poor stricken Magdalen might hope to hear those blessed words, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven." To these, and their sad case, must our thoughts this day be turned, and our endeavour be to devise how each of us may lend a helping hand towards their recovery.

Manifold as are the demands which are made upon Churchmen for their alms and offerings, towards the relief of the temporal and spiritual necessities of their brethren, yet is there nothing more capable of proof than this, that the vast wealth of this country is capable of meeting demands far more extensive than any which have yet been made, if the true principle of Christian almsgiving were not only in words recognised, but in deeds acted upon. I mean, *that willing-hearted sacrifice* which is the essence of true Christian charity. We find, my brethren, that we *can* part with more when we are *compelled* to do so, and yet that at the same time we abate not ought of our many comforts. An increased Income Tax has led many to discover what love for God had failed to reveal to them, viz. that they *could* have given more than they have given; and the law of man has exacted what the law of love was powerless to win. When then we are met together, as we are this day, with the view of promoting a work of as true Christ-like love as it is well possible to conceive, I will plead with you to aid us in this work by the love of Christ as the *motive-spring* of your charity; by entreating you to remember that, if God had not given us peace, you would have been *made* to part with yet more of that which God has given to you; and by inviting you to convert into a sacrifice upon the altar of Christian love, that portion of your worldly wealth which must otherwise have been exacted for the purpose of destroying your fellow-creatures. As citizens of the wealthiest country upon the face of the earth, you possess the means of largely aiding us—as members of the purest branch of the Christian Church, you are bound to show your readiness to

do so, when our object is the very one which brought our Redeemer from heaven to earth—to reclaim the wanderer—to bind up the broken-hearted—to set the captive free from sin and shame.

I would ask you then to associate yourselves with the work of mercy in which this Association is engaged, as you are members of this pure and holy Church. And first, I would appeal to the professed members of the Church to aid us by *the force of example*. The sin, the special sin against which this Association is pledged to wage unceasing war, is one which may greatly be checked by the force of example. For, who are they whose recovery we are seeking? Poor, weak, lost, abandoned women. But who has made them such? Who tempted, betrayed, abandoned them? Who made them outcasts of society? Who ruined and then spurned them? Am I wrong in saying that thousands of these unhappy victims of men's lowest passions have been brought to their wretched and degraded state by men of education, of worldly rank and position, who have used and perverted the power and influence of their rank and station to bring down to misery, despair, and death, the poor, the weak, and oftentimes *the orphan and the friendless*? But for the encouragement offered by such examples, it would not answer to the vile panders to human lust, to carry on a worse than slave trade between foreign countries, such as we know is going on at this moment. We would appeal to the great, the noble, the educated of the land, to those who by their influence and example, can do much to stay the growth and progress of the untold miseries of poor unhappy women, to exert that influence (which, as Christian men and women, they are bound to exert) by branding those who are known to sin against the law of chastity, with the same stigma with which they brand those who have offended against what they call the laws of honour. Again, if parents treat with levity, or call by gentle names, sins which bring a curse in this world and everlasting damnation in the next, they become themselves deeply responsible for that curse and for that damnation. If isolation be held necessary for preservation from the infection of a bodily disease, in the name of God let parents preserve the pure and innocent members of their families from the contaminating society of the fornicator and adulterer of whatever rank in life. The annals of the oldest Female Penitentiary in London could show, that even worldly rank and station may be brought down to the lowest degradation, if purity of mind be secretly undermined by those, who, though

notorious transgressors against the laws of chastity, are yet received and welcomed into what is called the *best* society. If we do rejoice in that purity of doctrine to which our branch of the Church bears testimony, let us endeavour to prove our appreciation of that purity and our desire to see its power more fully developed, by setting our faces as a flint against the vile destroyers of female purity, by daring to confront and oppose the fashions and false principles of the world with the pure principles of undefiled religion; and, conscious of the misery which unhallowed passion has brought upon thousands, by aiding in this God-like work of love and charity; the gathering in of penitents, and the recovery in them of that purity of heart without which they shall never see God. For this is what we seek to do—to meet the returning prodigal—to shelter her in the Church's home—and then, in due time, bid her “Go, and sin no more.”

Now, while this body of Associates is mainly employed in gathering *the means* by which the Church may establish her Penitentiaries wherever they may be needed, it desires especially to evoke a spirit which is peculiarly adapted for carrying on the work of Female Penitence. I mean the religious sympathy of educated, self-devoted, pious women. How many such are there, loving, faithful daughters of the Church, not cumbered with any special family duties, but who are sighing for a life of greater usefulness, who, if they would lend themselves with willing and unselfish hearts, to act under rule, and subject to the authority of those to whom is committed the care of souls, might become ministering angels to their fallen sisters, and be permitted from time to time to rejoice, as angels do, over many sinners repenting. So wise and so well framed are the rules by which these Penitentiaries are governed, that none need fear that the purity of their own minds would be sullied by contact with those whom they seek to serve and to save—while their gentle, loving, tender sympathy knows and feels far better than *we* can, by what avenues the readiest access may be gained to the heart of the female penitent. We ask of such *to give themselves*. The Church, our pure and holy Church, seeks such to aid Her in this work. Sisters of *Mercy* indeed will they be!

While then we would endeavour to enlist the force of example on the part of those who, by influence and station, are calculated to have the greatest weight in checking the progress of that deadening vice which carries so many to an early grave; and while we would seek the co-operation of those whose sympathetic influence might work so powerfully

in reclaiming the wanderer, I would appeal to all who are in any degree sharers of those treasures, which have made us the wealthiest nation in the earth, to cast a portion of those treasures into the treasury of the Church at this time, to enable us to provide quiet and peaceful asylums for the reception of those who, stung with remorse, and wearied and heavy laden with the burden of sin, are seeking rest and can find none. Sure I am that nothing tends more to draw down God's special blessing than gifts and offerings devoted to the special purpose of saving souls, for which Christ died. Experience teaches us every day that individuals and parishes are specially blessed in proportion to their self-denying efforts to make known the glad tidings of salvation in *heathen* lands. And it is impossible that any portion of our money can be better disposed of, or indeed laid out to larger interest, than that which is devoted to the work of saving souls. It will not therefore be supposed, by what I would say, that I could wish to check in any way the spirit of almsgiving which is prompted by the recollection of the heathen in distant lands, who are lying in spiritual darkness. Far from it. But I must nevertheless put in a plea for thousands in England who are farther from God perhaps than the very heathen. It is not a healthy spirit of charity which can pass by the beggar at our door and leave him to starve, while we send our alms, food, and raiment, to the not more destitute mendicant in another land. The lost sheep of the house of Israel were not passed by by Him who came to be the Light of the Gentiles. They were His own people, His own kindred according to the flesh, children of the stock of Abraham, and who had wandered far from God and the truth, to whom He Himself, and He laid the same charge upon his Apostles, first preached and made known the glad tidings of a Saviour. There are, my brethren, in this metropolis, and in many of the large towns of England, thousands who possess the same claims upon your *first* care and charity, but for whom, alas! none care. Of the same nation; baptized most of them into the same Church; trained many of them by as loving and fond parents as you yourselves have been blessed with; of whom once as bright hopes were entertained as those with which you are now looking upon your own loved daughters. But sin has marred the happiness of those homes—some vile seducers have plucked away perhaps the brightest flowers of those homes. Shame and fear have then come in to prevent the wanderer from seeking once again a parent's home and a parent's pardon. Not knowing whither to turn—cast upon

the waves of this heartless perilous world, they have by degrees grown hardened in vice, and then hardened themselves against the voice of conscience and the stings of remorse. But, O my brethren, if the poor wanderer had but early known that there was a refuge; had she but known that even a tenderer Mother than her whose heart she had broken, that *the Church* had provided an asylum for the fallen, an ark for the penitent, the career of sin might have been checked at the outset, purity of heart have been earlier and more easily recovered, that dark film which must otherwise for ever have shut out from her the Beatific Vision have been removed, and joy be brought even to angel hearts over that poor sinner repentant. Surely such as these have a claim upon us as strong as any heathen. Shall we "take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs?" That be far from us, my brethren! Many a poor penitent is knocking at the doors of our asylums, seeking to escape from the pitiless storm of misery, remorse, and mental agony raging within them. They reach, as they think and hope, the border of the shore; the effort has been great to reach it, but often and often are we *unable* to stretch out the hand of welcome and bid them enter our haven of rest. O it is a bitter reflection that perhaps their mental strength is too much exhausted for them to make another effort. And must they perish? Perish at the very point of safety? Alas! they must unless their brethren in the Faith, their fellow sinners, the ransomed by the same Cross and Passion, will put forth the friendly hand to revive, support, and rescue them. Have you the hearts, my brethren, to thrust these poor penitents from you? To shut against them the doors of reformation? Have you no heart to deny yourselves one single comfort, one single luxury, even though the sacrifice *might* save a soul for ever? Your refusal to help us is tantamount to your saying to such returning outcast, "Go back and sin the more! Go and rush in the agony of increased despair into further scenes of infamy and ruin! Go, and let the unclean spirit, with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, gain re-entrance into your wretched soul, and so your last state shall be worse than the first." But no, my brethren, these will not be your words! and least of all will they be the words of any of you who have sinned after the similitude of these women's transgressions. To their cry of "Help me or I perish," shall the no less guilty sinner's answer be, "What is that to us, see thou to that?" O brethren, by your own hope of pardon in that great day; by that innocence which, through grace,

you have been enabled to preserve ; by your dread of hearing the reproach of some lost soul in the other world which, but for your covetousness, might have been saved ; by the example of Him who once said to a sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn thee ; go and sin no more ;" by the love of Him whose death for us, for them, for all of us, we are upon the eve of commemorating, have pity upon these miserable sinners. Give them once more the hope that that Beatitude may be theirs, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

THE END.

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